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SPOTLIGHT ON...Walter "Jelly" Hines

BY ANNA FLANAGAN AND JEFF MACHOTA

A lifelong resident of Champaign, drummer Jelly Hines of Sorgum was born on August 1, 1951. He remembers listening to music from the age of five, and from an early age was attracted to percussion. Jelly recalls when the Douglass Center's Drum Corps would perform some of their routines for the black community before heading out to the Fourth of July parade. "And when I would see them coming," he says, "I would go in the house and get a bunch of pots and pans and go out behind the house and try to copy the rhythms of the drum corps."

Fortunately for Jelly, and those of us who enjoy listening to him play, his parents took note of his interest, giving Jelly a drum kit that once belonged to his father's uncle. He says from about the age of seven, he "beat the heck out of them, school's marching or concert every day" until he was able to purchase his own set with money earned from a paper route. In the eighth grade, Jelly became involved in the high school band program, along with his brother, who played trumpet. During high school, Jelly played with several groups, all of them consisting of player's from the school's marching or concert bands. Among these early groups...Eddie and the Sensations! Jelly says even though he was listening primarily to rhythm and blues...a lot of James Brown ("I was CRAZY about James Brown")...being involved with many different people in a variety of bands exposed him to all kinds of music.

Jelly started an architecture degree at the University of Illinois in 1969, though he says if he'd known then what he knows now, he'd have gone into music. He didn't give up music, however. He played for about two years with a lab band for non music majors, sponsored by the Afro-American Cultural Center. "During that time," Jelly says, "we would get a well-known artist, have him send charts down, practice that music for about 30 days, and then he would come down and do a concert with us at Krannert." Among those well-known musicians with whom Jelly played was Donald Byrd. In fact, Jelly's James Brown "fixation" paid off during a rehearsal with Byrd. Jelly was on congas, with another musician playing drums. Byrd didn't like what he was hearing from the drummer, so he asked Jelly, "Do you know how to play James Brown's licks?" No sweat for Jelly, who played "Cold Sweat," and went on to play that concert and four others with Byrd on the traps. Jelly describes the lab band as a "very beautiful experience." He says it's when he went from playing on level one to level two. Jelly feels there are three levels in playing music. "Your first level," he says, "you start out when you're just searching, trying to find yourself, trying to learn the music, learn the chords, the notes, the rhythms. There's a second

level, where you're able to express yourself. And then there's the third level, where you are master...you create new techniques, new rhythms, new concepts." Jelly figures he's on level two now, but he's working toward level three.

Jelly talks about Russell Cheatham and Sorgum with reverence and respect. He says he knew of Russell from an early age, but didn't meet him until the mid-70s. Jelly had stopped playing after leaving college in 1974...he was recently married, and trying to get his "family things together. "And Russell came," he says, "and basically got me out of the closet." Sorgum formed as a trio with Chuck Tripp on guitar, Russell on organ and Jelly on drums. The group began playing at Nature's Table in Urbana, and Jelly says, "From there it developed and flourished and didn't do anything but get better." Jelly says the Nature's Table gigs were his favorites-he loved playing in front of the mixed crowd of young students and old musicians, all of whom were blown away by the energy with which Jelly played. He says what makes any Sorgum performance memorable, regardless of venue, is the connection among the players. "We'll look at each other," he says, "and we can tell from facial expressions if we're getting to each other. If we're not, we'll turn it up a notch. It's all working, when you're dealing with Sorgum." By the way, you're only "dealing with" Sorgum if at least two of the original members are performing.

The quality of a Sorgum performance is the difference between jazz that's played emotionally and jazz that's played technically...and that's what Jelly listens for when he goes out to hear the new players on the scene. He says a lot of the local jazz players are playing technically. "They're reading the music, reading the lines...I try to focus on people trying to play emotionally... If there's any one thing I hope I've done, it's shown some people how to play feelings instead of playing technical," Jelly says. He admires the work of drummers Danny Deckard, Steve Adelman and Jeff Stitely, whom he thinks will one day be "monsters." Jelly recommends that all young players, first and foremost, keep your head; don't do drugs." In addition, he says learn the basics and, most importantly, listen. "Listen is the key to music," he says. "Listen as you're playing." Jelly is optimistic that, after a slow spell, the local jazz scene is coming back, thanks in part to CUJBA, the U of I Music School and President Clinton. "And I hope it comes back," Jelly says, "because I truly believe from jazz, everything is expressed."

Now, you didn't think we were going to end this profile without telling you how Jelly got his nickname, did you? It seems when Jelly was about seven years old, he was...as he puts it...three feet tall and four feet wide. A good friend of his gave him the nickname, saying, "It must be jelly, 'cause jam don't shake that way!" Well, the only thing Jelly's shaking these days is the house down....so keep an eye out for future performances by Sorgum or Jelly and friends to hear some fine, emotional jazz.